CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi are the legendary
figures in the great lines of sages and heroes and wise-men
in the annals of India. These two spiritual giants were born
when India was passing through a critical period. The first
Indian struggle for political independence (namely, Sepoy
Mutiny) from British subjugation took place just before some
years before these two great souls were born. In that struggle
India had to suffer defeat and consequently Indian people were
suffering from mental agony finding no other way out to make
India free from the colonisation of the Britishers. In the
meantime some good souls tried to analyse the cause for the
deplorable condition of the people of India that India had to
suffer set back not only politically but also in other discip-
lines like religions, philosophical, economic social etc; Some
people agreed that one of the important causes was the moral
degradation of the Indian people and, as a result, India could
never be made free from the political subjugation untill and
unless spiritual regeneration is brought about in the minds of
the people. They must be made alive to the rich religio-
philosophical and cultural heritage of India. Indians could
be united to fight against colonisation only when they could be made strong both morally and spiritually. So due to some untiring effort of some spiritual thinkers some religious institutions sprang up. But these organisations helped a little in order to reach the desired goal. Due to influence of western education and culture many Indians started neglecting their rich ethnic religion and culture and many converted into Christianity. So it was a crying need of Indian people to save the honour of their motherland and re-assert their lost rich religio-philosophical foundation. With this end in view some thinkers felt the necessity for re-interpreting the religious thoughts which would help in solving the practical problems of life in accordance with the needs of the day. While this humble attempt was going on by this time two spiritual giants, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi emerged in the Indian soil, one succeeding the other. These two souls were pregnant with vast amount of knowledge from the religious scriptures of the major religions of the world. With the knowledge of Indian philosophy like Vedas, Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Advaita Vedanta and other philosophical systems of India they could realise the true spirit and richness of Indian religion and culture. These two spiritual giants succeeded in making Indian people to believe that India is a land of religion. Religion is the
part and parcel of Indian life and also made impressions on them that all their problems could be solved if they cling to their own religion with honour and sincerity. They succeeded in raising the position of Indian philosophy and religion in such an altitude Indians could not but believe the superiority of the Indian religion and culture. In accomplishing all these, these two great souls had to renew the ancient Indian religious-philosophical concepts into concrete form in their own way so that religion could be made suitable for solving the problems of every walk of life. Both of them established religion on the sound footing of reason and scientific outlook.

Both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi realised that the task of religion is to renew contact with indispensable essence of religion. The essential truth and means of salvation which religion offers need to be expressed in terms that convey effectively to each successive generations. They also understood that if religion was to help in life, people can never afford to neglect the task of distinguishing the contingent and outward expression of it's unchanging essence and they must be ready to bring revolutionary changes in the traditional expression. This was a difficult task no doubt, but these two thinkers succeeded
in accomplishing the job.

Both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi defined the lines of India's growth, the path for her great rejuvenation. It is the way of rejuvenating the people of the world and India in particular by the Vedantic idea of divinity in all men and women. Being imbued with the Vedantic idea of oneness these two thinkers found the way of harmony of faiths and creeds. They had vision of an India may the world, unified by a flood of spirituality.

Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi affirmed that the eternal was to be realised in this earth itself. According to them love is fundamental to religion. Hence, they tried to bring about a revolution in religion through the medium of this life by transforming it, by changing it over. In order to ensure strong and stable unity, the ideals require to be strengthened. In the work of rebuilding human house religion plays a significant role. And for this reason both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi strongly advocated for preaching the gospel of universal religion - a religion which by no means sectorial religion but religion which is acceptable by all people of the world for all time to come. This religion knows no sectarian religion, no creed, race or geographical
Swami Vivekananda asserted that religion is not merely a concept but a reality. Universal religion is here and now. All other religions are small. Universal Religion is reality, the Religion beyond all religions. All religions are different expressions of this Religion—and these expressions are essentially neither contradictory nor antagonistic to one another. Universal Religion is, therefore, the summation, the sum total of all religions of the world. It is not a new religion but the co-existence of all religions with a spirit of give and take about it. A proper understanding of the relation between the eternal religion and its expressions is the crying need. Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi successfully succeeded in holding before the world that various religions were nothing but so many attempts of human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite. But each religion is determined by the condition of its birth and geographical position and each of these marks a stage of progress.

According to both these thinkers religion itself is a complex phenomenon essentially combined with cultural, social, linguistic and political factors. Hence, it was the aim of them to teach the world that all human problems must be solved through the understanding of the true spirit of religion. That
was the reason why they launched their political, social and economic activities on religions background. Apart from this they re-asserted the idea imbibed with the spiritual tradition that mere recognition of the good paths of other religions is not enough. Recognition must be followed by acceptance. They also warned that in assimilating the ideals of other religions each man should try to preserve one's own individuality. He needs a proper understanding of the spirit of one's own religion as well as that of others. He must make conscious effort to see the thread connecting all religious forming as if, a beautiful garland adoring the Supreme Being who is neither a Hindu, nor a Muslim, nor a Buddhist. All belong to Him but He transcends all. The Religion beyond all religious provides man with open air of freedom through which a religious man loves all and hates none. The view of 'Advaita' or 'Oneness' of humanity was the real teachings of both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

But it is to be noted that these two sacred souls of India were not satisfied with teaching theoretical religion in words but they also practised the true spirit of religion in their every walk of life and dedicated their lives for the sake of betterment of the entire human race.
Both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi emphasised that it was the task of Indian civilisation to overflow and flood the world with spirituality to bring a new life to the world. With this end in view they advised the people of India to shed fear, destroy castism and raise the down-trodden so that Indian people can become the torch bearer for showing new light of spirituality to the people of the world. They delivered the message of unity and equality and spoke of dignity of labour and consequently they succeeded in turning the eyes of the people of the whole world towards India for spiritual needs. The inspiring lectures delivered by Swami Vivekananda both in India and abroad, could exert influences over the people of the world and thereby he succeeded in asserting the supremacy of Indian religion and thereby he helped India to get rid of Western influences. Mahatma Gandhi also imbibed with the age-old teachings of Ahimsa as found in sacred books of India, successfully launched movement uniting the people of the land with a view gain political independence. Gandhi proved to the world that Ahimsa is such a spiritual force following which man can do even the impossible. He directed his political activities in the background of religion. Among contemporary leaders of the people Mahatma Gandhi stood alone in the eminence and uniqueness. He is a unique leader who practised what he
preached and gave out to the people what he tested in his own life. It is a fact that political freedom of India was one of his chief interests but he also worked for instilling the spirit of spirituality in the minds of the Indian people and worked for the upliftment of their material prosperity for he realised that a hungry belly could think of no God, religious ideals were meaningless to him. His ideal of 'Swaraj' was outwardly a political slogan but inwardly a spiritual ideal. He endeavoured to the nation the religion of divine love and human services.

Swami Vivekananda was a patriot saint. He did not involve himself directly in Indian struggle for political independence; but he was a tremendous source of inspiration for the freedom fighters. His inspiring speeches brought about fiery national spirit to the youths and consequently revolting groups swelled in numbers. Swami Vivekananda realised very well that if India was awakened to the realisation of unity, call of integrity, strength and selfishness political independence was sure to come; and all these works Swami Vivekananda tried to accomplish in his life time. His object was to produce 'man' in the real sense of the term so that they would be able to attain political freedom and also preserve it. He was the first man in the world
who gave to the west the Vedanta philosophy of essential divinity of life in their own language of reason and science and thereby he gained the ground for asserting the supremacy of philosophy and religion of India. His opening address to the World-parliament of Religions held at Chicago was an ovation to the eternal Indian spirit of fraternity and tolerance. According to Vivekananda harmony, not dissention was the spirit of religion. Swami Vivekananda found out the essentials of Hinduism from its non-essentials and preached the Universal Religion. He was a practical idealist through and through. His spirit of humanism knows no bounds. He was not interested in framing any theoretical religion but a human religion which can be put to maintain unity and solidarity of the human race for its onward march to eternal freedom.

Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi proved to the world that the spirit of tolerance is the very root of religio-philosophical tradition of India. Being the ardent devotee of this age-old tradition of India they appealed to the people of India and the people world over to rise above all sorts of narrowness of religions dogmas that jeopardise the communal harmony and hence asked the people to cultivate the spirit of tolerance in order to ensure peaceful coexistence of all
living beings on this earth. These two great souls of India reminded the people that religion should be one and sole interest in them. According to both of them religion is the foundation of their life, principle of growth and well-being.

The attitude of tolerance to other religious appealed to both of them. If religion is a binding force among mankind each and everyone irrespective of any caste, creed or religion, should pay equal respect for all other religions and should be tolerant to one another. It is religious tolerance which can bind together the hearts of all people and thereby prepare the ground for the universal love and brotherhood.

Self-perfection is the aim of religion, but until this aim gains ground of society as a whole, the world is not safe for civilization and humanity. The religious soul must seek for divine fulfilment. In order to become a fit member of this kingdom of humanity one must cultivate the spirit of tolerance. Brotherhood of all men irrespective of any race, caste, religion or nationality should be the ideal of each individual being. Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi imbibed with the Indian tradition of tolerance was even ready to sacrifice India herself at the altar not of freedom, but of truth. Both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi actively followed the cordial
virtues of life and as a result their patriotism was a prelude to internationalism.

Both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi pre-conceived the impending danger human race is facing and hence they suggested the ways and means for overcoming the worst fate of human race. Apart from this, in modern times the connection of war with science has grown gradually more and more intimate. The nuclear weapons possessed by certain countries have caused new fear regarding the destiny of mankind. Even the eminent scientist Einstein feared that there was a danger of extinction of all lives in the planet. Over and above presently the world is chased by some disrupting elements like racialism, fetishism, begotism, communalism, fanaticism etc; To express in the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishan - "We are at a critical period not only in the history of our country but in the history of the world. There are many people who think we are at the abyss. There is distortion of values, there is lowering of standards, there is wide spread escapism, a good deal of hysteria and people think of it and collapse in despair, frustration, helplessness. Such a kind of lack of faith in the spirit of man is a treason to the dignity of man. It is a insult to the human nature. It is the human nature to be brought about all the great changes that have taken place in the world".
India is a world in miniature where people belonging to all religions live. This is one of the reasons why our country has been following the ideal of secularism. The constitution of India has provided equal rights to all persons in order to practise their own religion without any interruption from outside. Yet some narrow minded men are trying to disrupt the communal or religious harmony of the country. As a result some stray communal riots sometime raise their ugly heads and thereby disturb the peaceful co-existence of the people. Hence, if human race decides itself to go on living peacefully they must have to make change in it's way of thinking, feeling and behaving. Mankind will have to learn to control their passions realising the true spirit of religion or in other words they must be tolerant. Mankind must submit itself to spirit. Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi realised the worst catastrophe that may follow owing to religious intolerance. Their mission was to ensure to make one end of all sorts of evil practices done in the name of religion.

Hence, it has become the crying need of the day to instill the spirit of tolerance in the minds of the people following the ideals shown by Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi to save India, nay the world, from the evil consequences of intolerance and pave the way for harmonious peaceful co-existence. And in
this regard the relevance of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi are of immense importance because Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi not only paid equal respect for all religions but also dedicated their lives with an end in view to ensure essential unity of mankind. Their lives were the embodiments of religious tolerance, universal love and brotherhood.

As both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi had significant and towering personality, so it is not possible to throw light on all the teachings of these two sacred souls of India. If it is asked what they gave to the people of India and the world, an equally counter question may be put what they did not give to the world. So in this dissertation an attempt has been made to look into only a single aspect, namely, religions tolerance. For better understanding of this aspect it is necessary to understand religion in general and Hinduism in particular. A discussion on religion and Hinduism in particular with its various doctrines have been worked out to highlight their views on religions tolerance. Over and above, discussion has been made on their religious background, their attitude to other religions also. For a better understanding of the concept of tolerance, the conceptual framework of their religions philosophy is also worked out. In addition to all these an
attempt has been made to discuss the diversity of religions, essential unity of all religions. A simple examination has also been made if there is any prospect for the establishment of Universal Religion as cherished by both Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Together with all these a humble attempt has been made if they succeeded in removing the misconception on religious issues from the mind of the people as a whole. Further the relevance of their teaching is also examined in the context of the problems faced by the present day world.
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